

Campus Climate: College Students' Attitude towards Homosexuality in Taiwan

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Abstract: All people should have equal rights. Educators must make sure that everyone is included and is treated fairly. Higher education institutions are considered more liberal and tolerant, yet there are marginalized students, such as those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. In November 2018, the Taiwanese electorate passed referendums to prevent recognition of same-sex marriages in the Civil Code and to restrict teaching about LGBT issues. We witnessed the heartbreaking results of a referendum on the question, in which a majority of Taiwanese people voted against same-sex marriage. This study is to investigate to understand people's attitudes toward the LGBT community on campus, analyze the attitudinal factors and seek to make the campus environment more LGBT friendly in a College in Taiwan.

Keywords: university campus climate, homosexuality, higher education

All people should have equal rights. Educators must make sure that everyone is included and is treated fairly. Higher education institutions are considered more liberal and tolerant, yet there are marginalized students, such as those from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. In 2017, the constitutional court ruled that it was unconstitutional that the civil code had failed to recognize the right of same-sex marriage. It gave the legislature two years to pass a law recognizing same-sex marriage and gave us hope that we would finally see change. In November 2018, the Taiwanese electorate passed referendums to prevent recognition of same-sex marriages in the Civil Code and to restrict teaching about LGBT issues. We witnessed the heartbreaking results of a referendum on the question, in which a majority of Taiwanese people voted against same-sex marriage. Before the vote, Taiwanese society had been torn apart by anti-LGBT rumors, biases, and discrimination. Members of the LGBT community were disappointed. For many LGBT people, discrimination and marginalization have increased thereafter.

Higher education institutions are microcosms of the larger society, which continues to struggle with bias, mistrust, misunderstanding, and intolerance of individuals who do not fit the norm (Medley, 2005). While the common perception of today's campuses is that they are relatively accepting and supportive of gays and lesbians, it was not so long ago that students who identified as gay or who were even simply rumored to be gay faced instant exclusion. Dilley (2002) traced the history of higher education from 1945 through to the 1960s and found that the on-campus climate tended to mirror the larger cultural and social trends that criminalized, demonized, and then pathologized gay identity and behavior. From the 1970s through to the 1990s, some institutions still sought to restrict gay student associations on and off-campus and denied the recognition and funding of student groups supportive of gay social or political activities.

Tamkang University Lanyang Campus is a branch of Tamkang University and has a small residential campus in Jiaoxi Township, Yilan County. Everybody, including teachers and staff,

must live on campus, and most students share a room with another student. As with most campuses around the world, there is a small LGBT community. Generally, it is considered that more highly educated people are more likely to have a liberal perspective. Previous studies have shown that more highly educated students tend to more easily accept the LGBT community than first- or second-year students (Schott-Ceccacci et al., 2009). However, researchers have been pondering as to whether there are gaps between this theory and the real community. To investigate these gaps between theory and the real college climate, this research was conducted with the following objectives:

- to understand people's attitudes toward the LGBT community on campus,
- to analyze the attitudinal factors, and
- to seek to make the campus environment more LGBT friendly.

Literature Review

Campus Climate

Garvey et al. (2017) examined campus climate perceptions from alumnx across 3121 LGBT undergraduate students who graduated from 1944 through 2013 and found differences in LGBT student campus climate perceptions across generations. Their results highlighted key academic experiences, co-curricular experiences, and institutional environments as influential to LGBT student climate perceptions, and empirical evidence that demonstrated generational progress and improved perceptions of campus climate for LGBT students. Studies about LGBT campus climate perceptions have continued to center on three areas: perceptions and experiences of LGBT people, perceptions about LGBT people and their experiences, and the status of policies and programs designed to serve LGBT collegians (Renn, 2010).

Consistent with Rankin and Reason's (2008) transformational tapestry model, two key environmental influences have been heavily studied among higher education scholars examining LGBT students: university policy/services and curriculum/pedagogy. Numerous scholars have documented the negative experiences of LGBT college students in academic environments (Billimoria & Stewart, 2009; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Linley & Nguyen, 2015; Patridge et al., 2014; Sevecke et al., 2015). Academic disciplines have a great influence on LGBT student outcomes because they are a critical microclimate of students' college environments (Vaccaro, 2012). Negative academic experiences may lead LGBT students to feel silenced and detached from classroom dynamics (Renn, 2010). These students may feel invisible as they do not see their experiences or identities represented in curricula (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Linley & Nguyen, 2015; Patridge et al., 2014; Renn, 2010).

Gender

Among the demographic characteristics, research regarding gender has been the most common. Many previous studies have found that gender is significantly related to a negative attitude toward LGBT people. In particular, men have been found to have a more negative attitude toward the LGBT community (Arndt & Bruin, 2006; Herek, 2002, Herek & Capitanio, 1999, Johnson & Greeley, 2007, Medley, 2005). In these gender studies, the gap between male and female attitudes has often been significant. Herek (2002) found that 48.8% of men felt *somewhat*

or *very uncomfortable* being around a man who is homosexual, while only 28.8% of women felt the same way. On the other hand, 35.6% of men felt uncomfortable with lesbians, compared with 42.7% of women. These results implied that many respondents were not supportive of homosexuals of the same gender as themselves; in other words, males were less supportive of gay men than females and females felt more uncomfortable with lesbians than males. However, some research found that the gender gap had less influence on LGBT attitudes

Method and Procedures

Tamkang University Lanyang Campus has been striving for internationalization and globalization by adopting the British educational system and the concept of holistic education originating from the prestigious Oxbridge universities. Student enrollment began in 2005 and all course instruction is English based. Furthermore, the Junior Abroad Program for all third-year students at specific sister universities as well as residential colleges where students and teachers share on-campus accommodation was adopted to strengthen life and academic tutoring to cultivate holistic talents. In recent years, the recruitment of international students has grown more active to introduce globalization into the campus. The arrangement of residential colleges is such that students are not allowed to leave the campus during the week without leaving. Thus, aside from daytime classes as well as college activities and a wealth of social activities in the evenings, the interpersonal interactions of the students are limited to less than 600 people on an exclusive campus, particularly because the accommodation arrangement is two to a room. Therefore, to homosexual students, the campus is an important part of their lives, while students' attitudes towards homosexuality and their interpersonal relationships will affect the self-identity of homosexual students and the friendliness of the student population towards them (Liu, Cheng, & Liu, 2004). Are students with minority sexual orientations widely accepted or more fearful of self-expression in such a confined context as the Lanyang Campus? To establish a friendly campus and a gender-equal educational environment, this study investigates the views on groups with minority sexual orientations in the Lanyang Campus. There are 972 people at Lanyang Campus, including professors, staff, and students from the different majors of global politics and economics (GPE), innovative and information technology (IIT), international tourism management (ITM), and English language and culture (ELC). The instrument used in this study is Attitudes toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender on University Campus. This questionnaire consists of demographic data questions and an Attitudes Toward Lesbian and Gay Men (ATLG) scale (Herek G. M., 1997), which was modified by the author to fit this study.

Results and Discussion

The study found that there was an attitude difference between males and females at Lanyang Campus, with females having a higher LGBT acceptance than males. This result is consistent with previous studies (Arndt & Bruin, 2006; Medley, 2005). In the regression model, the dummy variable *male* showed a negative relationship between being male and LGBT attitude for almost all statements. Furthermore, the regression results showed that males tend to have a more negative attitude to gay males than to lesbians. In this study, the lower the score, the more LGBT friendly this group is. The average score of men at ATL was 1.890 higher than that of women at 1.655. Similar results were observed at ATG. The t-value of RUN in a paired Sample T-test was < 0.05 , indicating that the attitude difference between men and women was statistically

significant. Therefore, female college students are generally more LGBT-friendly than male college students. Comparing college students' attitudes towards ATL and ATG, the average score of both men and women in ATL was lower than that in ATG, which indicated that both men and women held a more friendly attitude towards Lesbian than gay.

From previous studies, it has been shown that several demographic characteristics influence attitudes towards the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community. This paper's main purpose was to investigate attitudes towards the LGBT community at Tamkang University's Lanyang Campus from several demographic aspects: gender, occupation, political views, religion, and major. All these variables indicated an impact on LGBT attitudes. This section compares our findings with those of previous studies. This study was conducted to investigate the attitudes toward the LGBT community at Tamkang University's Lanyang Campus and to find which factors were correlated with a negative LGBT attitude. The results indicated that LGBT prejudice was quite low, and most participants had high LGBT acceptance. Even though the prejudice was low, several factors correlated with a negative attitude towards the LGBT community, such as having a conservative political view and being Christian. In the future, to ensure a more tolerant LGBT campus, we should foster a greater understanding of the LGBT community on campus and improve the climate on campus. We hope that this study is useful in understanding the campus climate and for promoting a more tolerant campus attitude towards the LGBT community.

The overt climate of fear that existed on US college campuses before the 1990s still lingers today and thus negatively shapes the experiences of LGBT students (Renn, 2010). Additionally, this retrospective underscores the reality that mere visibility will not address the oppressive settings present for LGBT communities in higher education settings.

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